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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

CHAPEL in GUINEA-STREET,

BRISTOL,

FEBRUARY 28th, 1794,

Being the Day appointed by Royal Authority,

FOR A

National Fast.

BY

RICHARD RODDA.

Published at the Request of the Hearers.

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A

DISCOURSE, &c.

JEREMIAH v. Ver. 29.

Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: *Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

HEAR the Word of the LORD, ye ſtout hearted, and far from righteouſneſs; the LORD hath a controverſy with the ſons of men. Attend, leſt the powerful arm of the eternal Jehovah deſcend, and wrath to the uttermoſt overtake you.

OUR ſins of the ſcarlet and crimſon dye, are awfully written as with a ſun-beam on almoſt every man we meet. Our multiplied tranſgreſſions, call loudly for vengeance; and nothing but the interpoſition of our powerful Advocate, has prolonged our reprieve. What rapid ſtrides have we made from one evil to another, until we have almoſt filled up the meaſure of our iniquities. As a nation, what avowed infidelity, bare-faced corruption, unbluſhing profligacy, and unbounded diſſipation, parade our ſtreets, and bid defiance to GOD; though he has ſolemnly declared, he will by no means clear the guilty. *Shall I not visit for these things? saith the* LORD: *Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

VIEW a neighbouring Nation fraught with the above-mentioned evils. Succeſsful rebellion has emboldened the factious; diſaffection, diſunion, and diſcontent, like the increaſing circles of troubled waters, have haſtened the diſſolution of the body politic, and pretended patriotiſm has given the finiſhing ſtroke.

THE great patrons of vain Philoſophy and Infidelity, the genuine diſciples of *Voltaire* and *Rouſſeau*, have diſſolved all the ties of nature and fraternity; and, overcome by a ſpirit of boundleſs ambition, have trampled under foot all laws, human and divine! Theſe ancient, hereditary enemies of Great Britain, collect their forces, and like a tremendous ſtorm, hang over us, ready to deſcend, and ſweep our land with deſtruction. Abroad the ſword bereaveth, and at home there is as death.

AT a time when Britons ſhould be united as the heart of one man, to oppoſe the common foe, what contention and ſtrife are found among us? How many falſe patriots wiſh to riſe into power, even at the hazard of burying themſelves in the ruins of their country? Men of deſperate fortunes, men of reſtleſs ambition, who, like rebellious Jeroboam, are ready to ſacrifice every thing to the imaginary calves of lawleſs Liberty and Equality! GOD preſerve our Sovereign, and all his dominions, from the fraud and force of all wicked and unreaſonable men, and turn the counſels of their Ahithophels into fooliſhneſs.

BUT I will flatter no man; all have ſinned and come ſhort of the glory of GOD. Had we not ſinned as a nation, what neceſſity would there have been of ſetting apart this day for faſting and humiliation? The innocent have nothing to fear; but we are not innocent; this ſolemn day proclaims us guilty ſinners, deſerving the wrath of GOD, and the vengeance of eternal fire! The charge is general: *Ah ſinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a ſeed of evil doers, children that are corruptors.* Iſa. i. ver. 4. The whole head is ſick, and the whole heart is faint.

BE wiſe, O ye kings; be inſtructed ye Judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear. His ſacred Majeſty King George, whoſe perſon I love, whoſe high office I revere, and in whoſe juſt rights I am ready (when legally called to it) to ſhed my blood, is nevertheleſs accountable to that Supreme Being by whom kings reign. The Royal appointment of this day is a tacit acknowledgment of this truth. Petitions from an earthly throne, addreſſed to the Throne of Glory, are public declarations, that the LORD GOD Omnipotent ruleth in the kingdoms of men.

THE King of Great Britain is a ſubject to none, but GOD and his Meſſiah. His elevation is upon the pinnacle of worldly greatneſs; and his ſhining example is, or ought to be, as conſpicuous as his eminent ſtation.

IN the exerciſe of chriſtian devotion, in diffuſing domeſtic happineſs, in the practice of perſonal virtues, where do we find his equal in the annals of kings? In the ſuſpenſion of perſecution, in the protection of religious and civil liberty; in the encouragement given to arts and ſciences, in the extent given to trade and commerce—in what kingdom of the world can we find his rival, or even his competitor? He hath fully made good that declaration worthy of himſelf, when he firſt aſcended the throne of theſe realms: "No man in my dominions ſhall be perſecuted for conſcience ſake!" Words worthy to be written on the heart of every loyal Briton.

IF there are men in office of known profligacy, and barefaced infidelity, theſe corrupt ſtreams are not derived from the fount of Majeſty. The iniquity be on them, and upon their fathers' houſe; the king, and his throne be guiltleſs.——It is greatly to be lamented, that under human governments, things ſacred are too often treated

as the tools of politics; diſtinguiſhed ſituations in Church and State are frequently filled up by intereſt or favour, without a proper regard to the qualifications neceſſary for the diſcharge of them.

THE ſins complained of by the weeping prophet, are the common, crying ſins of our land. The Jewiſh nation were charged with ſwearing falſely; and is this charge without foundation, when brought home to our conſciences? Are there no profane ſwearers among us? Are there not thouſands who wantonly call for damnation upon themſelves, or their fellow-creatures? Who blaſt, or curſe their own eyes, limbs, &c. without any thought or remorſe of conſcience? *Shall I not visit for these things? ſaith the* LORD.

IF it be ſaid by way of palliation, theſe are the vulgar, the ignorant who know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their GOD: I aſk, did the prophet ſpeed better among the rich and great? No: He declares theſe have altogether broken the yoke and burſt the bonds. Have not prodigality and diſſipation, produced intrigue, uncleanneſs, fornication, and adultery? If honour and virtue are the badges of true nobility, let thoſe who have diſhonoured their rank by contracting habits of vice, bluſh, if they are capable of ſhame, at the contraſt their manners exhibit to every thing truly noble, great and good! My GOD! what examples are theſe for perſons in inferior ſtations to imitate! The practice of ſuch is obvious to all around them; it is utterly inconſiſtent with, and totally contradictory to, every precept of the goſpel. Do multiplied divorces increaſe their noble privileges? Do they not rather evince the corruption of the heart, and tell how dubious is the parentage of the riſing generation? How numerous the tribe of thoſe, who, deſtitute

of every idea of their Creator, demean themſelves to the baſeſt offices of poiſoning the minds, and debauching the morals of their countrymen, by bribery, perjury, drunkenneſs, revelling, quarrelling, and even murder itſelf.

AN external regard for Religion, has been ever eſteemed as beneficial to ſociety, and highly politic; but many of the great and the gay have entirely emancipated themſelves from theſe ſhackles.

Public worship, eſtabliſhed in every nation under heaven, and obſerved by Jews, Turks, and Pagans, (however falſe their religion be,) they treat with contemptuous neglect; though GOD hath ſaid, ye ſhall ſanctify my ſabbaths, and reverence my ſanctuary. *The day of* GOD is profaned not only by themſelves, but they fix on it in preference to other days, for journies of pleaſure; thereby making their ſervants partakers in their crimes. *The worship of* GOD in their families is not known; a bended knee to the Supreme Being would indeed be a prodigy under their roof. *The Book of* GOD lies buried in duſt on their ſhelves, its ſacred contents utterly unknown; or if a ſmattering of it be picked up, it is merely in order to furniſh matter for ſome infidel ſcoffer to ridicule.

IS not the moſt ſacred *Ordinance* of eating and drinking the body and blood of CHRIST the LORD, trampled under foot, and turned from with abhorrence? except, when as a qualification for honour or office. If this be not eating and drinking unworthily, I know not what is!

SHALL I add their profeſſed infidelity, imbibed at the great corrupted public ſchools; confirmed at the univerſities, or in foreign travels; and conſummated by that intercourſe in which their ſtation in life places them; where their fellows are of the ſame ſtamp with themſelves, and mutually conſpire to harden each other; whilſt they merrily

merrily ſay, the prophets prophecy falſely, and the prieſts bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it ſo: Biſhops, Prieſts, and Deacons, believe no more of the reality of the religion of Jeſus, than we do.

BUT will thoſe who are called Miniſters of Chriſt, bear this? O ye lights of the churches, ye ſtars in the right hand of him that ſitteth on the throne, does this reflection belong to you? Does this character correſpond with your office? GOD your offended Judge ſaith, if ye are ſeers by office, how is it that ye are blind in practice? If I appointed you to feed my flock, why do you ſuffer them to periſh for hunger? If ye be the ſalt of the earth, where is your ſavour? If ye be the light of the world, why do ye not ſhine? Why do ye ſuffer thoſe under your charge to ſit in darkneſs? If I appointed you to be my mouth, why are ye dumb? If you be unequal to your duty, why are you ambitious to hold your offices? If equal to it, why do you not diſcharge it? The fire of the prophets, the precepts of the goſpel, the examples of the apoſtles, the ſtate of the church, the terrible day of judgment, eternal rewards and everlaſting woes—are theſe nothing to you?

PERHAPS, you never entered in by the door into the ſheep-fold; perhaps, you were never inwardly moved by the Holy Ghoſt to take upon you this ſacred office; but if ſo, can any thing equal the horrible guilt of making ſuch public profeſſions in the ears of GOD and men? If you have intruded yourſelves into the courts of GOD, if you have ſtepped over the threſhold into his temple with conſcious hypocriſy, and daring blaſphemy, what can be expected from ſuch an unhallowed miſſion? Again, have the holy epiſtles to Timothy and Titus been the models on which you have endeavoured to form your temper, your conduct and your labours? Are you

dead

dead to filthy lucre, fearleſs of offending, indifferent to men's eſteem, ambitious of the honour that cometh from GOD only? Are you faithful in the diſcharge of your ſacred truſt, diligent in teaching and preaching the word, inſtant in ſeaſon and out of ſeaſon, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, comforting the feeble-minded, and confirming the weak?

HAVE you but one care, to approve yourſelves faithful ſtewards of the myſteries of your holy religion, and wiſe ſervants in improving every talent committed to your care? Have you but one object, the glory of GOD in the ſalvation of immortal ſouls?

OR, have you intruded into the miniſtry for maintenance, ſought it as a genteel profeſſion, having entered it with a conſcience polluted with falſehood, and impenitently perſevering, made your profeſſion a cloak of unrighteouſneſs? Hath the fleece been dearer to you than the flock, and hath gain been your godlineſs? Hath criminal diſſipation been your employment, inſtead of ſeeking thoſe loſt ſheep, whom Jeſus came to ſave? Have you flattered and fawned on the rich and great, ſeeking hereby that honour and preferment that cometh from man? Have you gained dignity in the church by the exemplarineſs of your conduct, the abundance of your labours, the fervour of your zeal, and the improvement of every ſpiritual gift? Or rather has it not been through your relation to, or connexion with, ſome great men in office? perhaps being the aſſociate of their pleaſures, or the partizan of their politics.

Shall I not viſit for these things? ſaith the LORD.

HOW fearful, how awful the account ſuch muſt give! and becauſe diſbelieved, deſpiſed and forgotten, the more ſure, near and tremendous!

BUT

BUT ſhall we find more of the power of vital godlineſs among the civilians? Are theſe upright in all their undertakings? Do they never eſpouſe a bad cauſe? Do they always obſerve that golden rule, whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye alſo unto them, for this is the law and the prophets? It is utterly impoſſible this ſhould be the caſe, where gold is the idol, and ambition is the ſpur. Is there no perverſion of evidence, no ſubornation of perjury, no torturing of truth to disfigure its features, found in your courts? If ye are altogether clear in theſe matters, GOD be praiſed for the reformation!

HAVE the gentlemen of the vital faculty no ſhare in the guilt of our nation? Are they all blameleſs and harmleſs? Do they never prolong a cure to increaſe their fees, and ſwell their bill? O ye ſons of Hippocrates and Galen, if your religion has been ever proverbial, ſurely this day ye can claim no ſingular exemption from the experience of paſt ages.

WE boaſt of our numerous armies, of our wooden bulwarks; but are not thoſe men who are called the defenders of our country, enſlaved by their paſſions, and taken captive by the Devil at his will? We dare not impeach their courage, we dare not charge them with cowardice. No: They are bold and intrepid, they are reſolute and perſevering, they pant for fame, and burn for military glory. But are they not profane? Are not their mouths full of curſing and bitterneſs? while their feet are ſwift to ſhed blood; deſtruction and miſery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.

WHEN a victory is obtained, is it not wholly aſcribed to the arm of fleſh, to the ſkill and bravery of our commanders, and the undaunted heroic ſpirit of our men?

Whereas

Whereas the GOD of battles is ſeldom or never taken into the account. Shall I not viſit for theſe things? Saith the LORD: Shall not my ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this? I do not intend at this time, to animadvert or reflect, upon any denomination of Proteſtant Diſſenters, if they are poſſeſſed of as much Loyalty and Religion as Iwiſh them; my heart ſhall ſay, Bleſſed are the people that are in ſuch a caſe, happy are they who have the LORD thus for their GOD.

BUT my brethren, I dare not charge others, and wholly exempt ourſelves. Are we who are called Methodiſt-preachers, and who have hitherto called ourſelves members of the Church of England? are we altogether clear in this matter? We ſtill retain the form of Godlineſs, but do we ſtill retain the life and fervour of religion we once had? Are we as ready as at the beginning, to ruſh into every open door to ſpread the Goſpel of Chriſt, in defiance of the World and the Devil; to follow Jeſus through evil, as well as through good report? Are we undaunted in pain and wearineſs, unwearied in watching and faſting, do we ſtill glory in the croſs of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and are we hereby crucified unto the world, and the world unto us? Are we as zealous for the LORD of Hoſts as Phineas, in executing the will of the LORD, by giving the mortal wound to the body of ſin? Fired with the love of precious ſouls, do we imitate Aaron, by ruſhing between the living and the dead, and with hands lifted up, pour out our hearts to that GOD who killeth and maketh alive? Or are we degenerated from one of our firſt principles, which is (under GOD) to ſave our own ſouls and the ſouls of thoſe that hear us? Do we domineer and lord over GOD's heritage, or are we ſtill the ſervant of all, for Chriſt's ſake? Do we imitate the great Shepherd, by feeding the flock, by gathering

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the lambs with our arms, and bearing them in our bosoms? Or do we by our intemperate zeal, cauſe the lame to wander out of the way, and the flock to drink of the waters of ſtrife? Do the riſing generation bid fair to be as meek and lowly, as humble and teachable, as thoſe who have gone before them, and into whoſe labours they have entered? Is there no danger of our falling aſleep in our watch-towers? Is it not our duty to be ſober and watch unto prayer? If we ſleep, will not our enemies watch over us for evil? will they not rejoice in our fall, and ſhout in helliſh triumph, there! there! ſo would we have it; they are fallen, let them riſe no more? If there is found among us, evil ſurmiſings, tale-bearing, back-biting, and evil ſpeaking, Shall I not viſit for theſe things? Saith the LORD.——GOD of Elijah, thou that anſwereſt by fire, kindle afreſh the fire of divine love upon the altar of our hearts. Renew our commiſſion; bid us fly throughout the world, preaching the everlaſting Goſpel to every creature; and let thy word be enforced by the Holy Ghoſt ſent down from heaven! Help us to lift up our voice with ſtrength; to ſound the jubilee of the LORD; for the year of his Redeemed is come!

PARDON me, my brethren, if I have made too free with the Methodiſts and their Preachers; conſider me as a party concerned, and if there is any declenſion, I include myſelf in your condemnation. But there is a leading feature in the character of every real Methodiſt; he fears GOD and honours the King. Where this is wanting in any member of the ſociety, either the work was never genuine, or that member is fallen from the grace of his ſtation. This is an obſervation I have made for forty years paſt, and the Hiſtory of the Methodiſt-Soldiers in Flanders, under the valiant Duke of Cumberland, carries this truth to an earlier period.

THAT

THAT there is a firm, a general attachment to our King and Conſtitution among all denominations of men (except bare-faced Jacobins) I have no reaſon to doubt; and yet, to ſay we have every thing to hope, and nothing to fear would be preſumptuous; for if the leaders and guides of the people are not innocent, how then can the people be clear!

IT is true where the light of revelation has not ſhined, it may greatly extenuate the guilt. In popiſh countries where the ſenſe of ſcripture is only announced from the lips of a Prieſt, there may be ſome palliation for the darkneſs that covers their miſguided flocks: But no plea can be admitted for thoſe Proteſtants, who have the Bible lying uſeleſs in their houſes. Theſe may know, if they will, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of GOD.

BUT a neglect of the Bible, that perfect rule of faith and practice; attended by a ſervile imitation of thoſe who ought to know, and do better; has involved the general maſs, in the ſame guilt and condemnation.

"Men of all ranks, lie drown'd in Sin;
"And Tophet yawns to take them in."

BUT is there no way to eſcape? Is there no poſſibility of averting our impending ruin? Muſt GOD ſay, ſword go through the ſinful land; ſpare neither ſmall nor great, but execute my judgments upon the guilty!

GREAT GOD! if the decree is gone forth, what habitation can ſecure us, from the cottage to the palace? What garriſon can defend us? can numerous fleets and powerful armies, protect us from the vengeance of offended juſtice?

Where! where, for refuge ſhall the guilty fly!

COULD

COULD we ſink to the centre of the earth, we ſhould ſtill remain naked and open to that Being, whoſe laws we have broken, whoſe Majeſty we have affronted, and whoſe goodneſs we have deſpiſed.

BUT will not the Judge of all the earth do right? Will he deſtroy the righteous with the wicked? ſhall the remnant who ſtill lift up the ſtandard of the crucified Jeſus, and ſtem the torrent of prevailing iniquity; ſhall theſe who tremble at thy frown, be involved in the overflowing ſcourge? Thine infinite Majeſty declares againſt it. Eternal truth has ſpoken, Say ye to the righteous, it ſhall be well with him! The righteous can ſay, In the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee, the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our law-giver; he will ſave us. O ye precious ſons of Zion! ye pillars of the earth, ye lights of the world; except the LORD of hoſts, had left unto us a very ſmall remnant, we ſhould have been as Sodom, or as the plains of Gomorrah.

CRY aloud, ſpare not; call upon your neighbours, your relatives, and ſay, You muſt repent, or periſh. You muſt baniſh your ſins, or your ſouls will be baniſhed from GOD for ever! National ſins unleſs timely repented of will draw down the judgment of GOD upon us.

LET the miniſters of GOD weep between the porch and the altar and ſay, Spare thy people O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen ſhould rule over them. If we this day as a nation, have truly humbled ourſelves before GOD; we ſhall ſoon ſee the good effects of it; he will not blot out our name from under heaven; but he will be jealous for his land, and will pity his people. He hateth putting away. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, ſaith the LORD, I will heal your backſlidings, and will love you freely.

O BRITAIN,

O BRITAIN, hear his voice, and harden not thy heart, turn at his reproof, he waiteth to be gracious! He hath ſpared thee becauſe he delighteth in mercy. For a ſmall moment he hath hid his face from thee, but with everlaſting kindneſs he will gather thee. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things! Thy light ſhall break forth as the morning, and thy health ſhall ſpring forth ſpeedily: thy righteouſneſs ſhall go before thee, and the glory of the LORD ſhall be thy rereward.

THOUGH the calamities of war are deeply to be regretted, and the bleſſings of peace earneſtly to be deſired; yet, it is not uncommon for the ſtorms and tempeſts of winter to precede the chearing ſpring and fruitful ſummer. It is a maxim in divine politics, to bring good out of evil. The darkneſs that overſpreads contending nations, will ſoon be diſpelled by the beams of the uncreated ſun of righteouſneſs; and the light of that day ſhall be ſeven-fold, as the light of ſeven days. Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart. The people that ſit in darkneſs ſhall ſee a great light; and the glory of the Lord ſhall ariſe upon them. Then will he turn upon them a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to ſerve him with one conſent.

INSTRUMENTS of cruelty ſhall be rendered uſeleſs; ſwords ſhall be beat into plough-ſhares, and ſpears into pruning-hooks; Ephraim ſhall not envy Judah, and Judah ſhall not vex Ephraim: but GOD will give them one heart and one way. Wars ſhall ceaſe in all lands, and JESUS CHRIST the Prince of Peace ſhall be acknowledged by all. Every partition wall ſhall be removed, and Jews and Gentiles formed into one church, under the goverment of the great Shepherd and Biſhop of Souls.

THE

THE LORD will in that day *visit* in mercy, he will walk in his ſanctuary, he will rejoice in the habitable part of the earth; and his delight will be with the ſons of men.

HE will be the ſalvation and ſafety of his people, and they ſhall all know him from the leaſt unto the greateſt. The curſe ſhall be removed from the earth, and the divine benediction fully reſtored: As I live, ſaith the LORD, the whole earth ſhall be filled with my glory; then ſhall the morning ſtars again ſing together, and all the ſons of GOD ſhout for joy! Theſe are the true ſayings of GOD, believe, and ye ſhall be eſtabliſhed.

To aſk when ſhall this come to paſs, is more curious than uſeful; GOD will haſten it in his time; our duty is to be found watching, to be engaged in fervent, faithful, perſevering prayer. The Spirit in the bride ſay come; the bridegroom ſaith, ſurely I come quickly! May all our hearts and voices cry out Amen! Even ſo, come LORD JESUS!

THE END.

BRITISH
MUSEUM